28: Spiro--137 (1947-48) 1949 Woleaians
116, 888, 561, 554 Ifalik

"As far as I can determine age brings neither greater nor less prestige. It is true that the old are not as economically useful as the young but it seems that the subsistence is plentiful enough so that their relative economic inactivity is not viewed as a drag on the economy. On the other hand, their greater age is not, ipso facto, an indication of greater wisdom. A wise person retains his wisdom as he ages. A mediocre person is no wiser because of age. Formally, therefore, there seems to be little if any cultural evaluation placed on old age. It must be remembered, furthermore, that this is an egalitarian society, in which general statuses are about equal, and in which only specific statuses differ. This is, the status of a navigator or carpenter, or fisherman is higher than others, which are about equal. Differential status, therefore, is almost always a function of achievement in a specific activity. This being the case, the status continues into old age.

At no time did I see the slightest indication of resentment against an older person because of inability to perform certain tasks.

On the other hand, though the culture does not evaluate age in terms of any invidious distinctions, the aging person may very well experience the process of aging as more or less pleasant than youth. In speaking with the men, they said that the reactions to old age are not the same. An old man usually cannot marry a young girl, he cannot engage in many kinds of work, the Japanese would not hire him for labor, and thus he could make no money. On the other hand, the old man has prestige and respect, and young people will turn to them for advice, since they 'savvy many thing.'"

The households varied greatly in size, from one which included only one old man and one old woman, to another (Falepenach) which had twenty-six persons. The household system was matrilineal, and when a man married he moved into the household to which his wife belonged. In the matter of what belonged to which household, a man generally seemed to know much more about the household of his mother than about the household of his wife, even though he had been living in the latter for many years. There was considerable informal movement among the households—people sometimes eating and sleeping regularly in a household to which they didn't really "belong"—which introduced a considerable element of confusion into the census making. This informality plus clan relationships and other family ties meant that labor was not strictly apportioned by household—the two old people who officially represented the smallest household were as well looked after as old people would be in a household with numerous members. Everyone really "belonged" to the whole island.

This matter of "belonging" had been on my mind ever since reading that thought-provoking short novel by Carson McCullers, *Member of the Wedding*. The "security" of the children of Ifaluk impressed us from the very beginning. Every child was a member not only of a family and a household, but of the whole island society. A child crying would be comforted by the nearest adult. Curiously, the children, though "secure", were far from obnoxious—in fact it would be difficult to imagine a more delightful bunch of kids. The "sibling rivalry" that seems to plague every American household was conspicuous by its absence—the mannerly, non-aggressive character of Ifaluk society extended even to the five-year-olds.

The security of the children of Ifaluk is probably still further increased by the widespread system of adoption. Ted found that over a third of the children of the island had been "adopted" by couples who were not their biological parents. When a couple for some reason wish another child, they go to a pregnant woman (who must be of the clan of either the adopting father or adopting mother) and ask if they may adopt the child when it is born. The request, it is said, is never refused. The adopting mother goes to the birth house with the real mother—all children are born in a special house, which is taboo to men—and stays there while the baby is born. The biological mother keeps the baby

41: Bates & Abbott N-5 (1953) 1958
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pulled out and dumped, ready for distribution. This, as always, was the special function of Toroman. Five big red fish were put in a pile by themselves, for the chiefs, and there was another pile of special kinds of fish, mostly trigger-fish, set aside by custom for the old men. The remainder of the catch was sorted out roughly by size into piles of large, medium-sized and small fish. In the meanwhile, men representing each of the various households gathered around, smoking and chatting. All had freshly-woven coconut baskets for their share of the catch. These baskets, quickly made from the green palm frond, were the ordinary packaging material of the island.

In the first round, Toroman tossed to each man two of the larger and three of the middle-sized fish. Then each got ten to twenty fish from the middle-sized and small piles, the number depending on the size of the fish and the number of people in the household. Then every family got one more large fish.

Don and Yani weighed a few specimens of the different kinds and sizes of fish, and calculated that the total catch was about 630 pounds. About forty pounds of the smallest fish were thrown out as too small for use, or because they were of kinds considered inedible. The seine catch as distributed, amounted to about two pounds of fish per individual inhabitant.

Everyone had fish that evening, and very good it was. Several of the most prized kinds of fish were given to us. These were expertly fileted by Bakal, and equally expertly fried by Ted in bacon grease after being rolled in corn meal. Ted was a master at this. Jobs around the Fan Nap were generally pretty equally shared, but Don and I always tried to maneuver Ted into the fish frying job—not, for once, out of indolence, but because he really did have a touch. The Ifalukians generally roasted fresh fish like these whole over coals from small coconut-husk fires, and they were awfully good that way, too.

This kind of fishing, with giant rope-and-coconut-leaf tinsel dragged over the coral bottom of the outer reef, was called rop fishing. Whether Ifalukian rop had any connection with English rope was questionable. Ted thought the similarity coincidence, since the rop fishing must have been an ancient practice, long antedating any contact with English.

The Ifalukians, like the people of all of the old Micronesian and